PATTERN AND PURPOSE IN THE PROSE OF *MUCH ADO ABOUT NOTHING*

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Much Ado About Nothing, it has often been remarked, reaches a high-water mark in Shakespeare's use of a mannered, schematic rhetoric derived from euphuism. Three-quarters of the play is in prose, and the prose keeps up a perpetual and varied choreography, like Beatrice's Scotch jig, measure, and cinque-pace. The degree to which rhetorical patterning forms an armature may be illustrated in Borachio's midnight confession to Conrade, in which he reveals how he has assisted in the slandering of Hero. Before he comes to his tale, he has some parenthetical complaints to register against the tyranny of fashion:

> Seest thou not, I say, what a deformed thief this fashion is? how giddily 'a turns about all the hot-bloods between fourteen and five-and-thirty? sometimes fashioning them like Pharaoh's soldiers in the reechy painting, sometime like god Bel's priests in the old church window, sometime like the shaven Hercules in the smirched worm-eaten tapestry, where his codpiece seems as massy as his club?[1]

Apart from the surprise of hearing this self-confessed drunkard so precisely knowledgeable about paintings, tapestries, and stained glass windows, there is further surprise in hearing his speech so carefully carpentered, with the three instances of the deforming power of fashion arranged in climactic order, the last one comically extended and particularized by the detail of the codpiece. A moment later, Borachio comes to the account of his misdoings on the previous night. The Prince and Claudio, he explains, took the disguised Margaret to be Hero,

> but the devil my master knew she was Margaret; and partly by his oaths, which first possessed them, partly by the dark night, which did deceive them, but chiefly by my villainy, which did confirm any slander that Don John had made, away went Claudio enraged. . . .
> (III.iii.142-147)

From what bottle, we are tempted to ask, did this tippler imbibe such lucidity? Shakespeare makes no attempt here to suggest drunken confusion, either through grammatical incoherence, inconsequence of thought, thickness of accent, or any other symptom of an addled brain. Instead, he confers on Borachio a precisely patterned sequence in which each of the three

contributing causes to the deceit is linked to its observed effect, with the causes arranged in order of occurrence and also in ascending order of importance. The drunkenness, it would seem, serves no other purpose than to afford a pretext for Borachio's blabbing.

On the other hand, when he does wish to suggest mental confusion, Shakespeare is quite capable of doing it in such a way as to leave rhetorical structures intact. In Dogberry's case it is a matter of semantic reversal:

> To be a well-favored man is the gift of fortune, but to write and read comes by nature. . . . Well, for your favor, sir, why give God thanks and make no boast of it; and for your writing and reading, let that appear when there is no need of such vanity.
>
> (III.iii.13-19)

Dogberry overturns the expected and conventional relation between human faculties and superhuman forces, making nonsense of the whole conception. But the semantic muddle in no way disturbs the precise geometry of the syntactic figures, and only gives us the queer sense of gazing into a looking glass in which familiar objects are seen backward. Elsewhere, in such aphorisms as "the ewe that will not hear her lamb when it baes will never answer a calf when he bleats," it is the rusticity of the comparison, and its near-irrelevance to the matter at hand, but not the syntax, that betrays its speaker's incurably rustical state of mind.

From these illustrations one might infer the pervasive syntactic patterning that underlies the language of the play. What the illustrations alone do not show is how Shakespeare varies and manipulates the patterning, how he implies differing uses of it and differing attitudes toward it, and so makes it an active element in the progress of the story.[2] We notice, for example, the initial greeting between Don Pedro and Leonato, how ceremonially stiff it is, and slightly wooden in its ceremoniality:[3]

> PEDRO. Good Signior Leonato, are you come to meet your trouble? The fashion of the world is to avoid cost, and you encounter it.
>
> LEONATO. Never came trouble to my house in the likeness of your grace; for trouble being gone, comfort should remain; but when you depart from me, sorrow abides and happiness takes his leave.
>
> PEDRO. You embrace your charge too willingly.

This is pretty, but one feels a certain empty fluency in it. It is the style of men, meeting in public, inventing extravagantly polite and courtly things to say to each other. Some of Leonato's earlier utterances make the same impression, such as his response to the news that Claudio's uncle wept for joy on learning of his nephew's valor: "A kind overflow of kindness. There are no faces truer than those that are so washed. How much better is it to weep at joy than to joy at weeping!" (I.i.24-26). Of this series of exclamations, the first is a well-meant pun, expressive of the speaker's good nature, but quite without the bite or complexity of such a version of it as Hamlet's —"a little more than kin, and less than kind"—which articulates a whole

moral vision and delineates a whole temperamental bias. Leonato's second statement is a sentimental claim that is hard to take seriously even as a *façon de parler.* In what sense, if any, can tears of joy be said to be "truer" than those shed for sorrow? Is sorrow being downgraded as an inauthentic emotion? But it is the final axiom—"How much better is it to weep at joy than to joy at weeping"—that strikes us, I think, as a really discouraging banality, and reveals the essential limpness of Leonato's whole posture. And it may be suspected that this rather facile dallying with formulae of compliment connects with the shallowness of insight that impels him, later on, to believe his daughter's guilt on the mere accusation of the princes, and to seize on the best evidence of her innocence, her blush, as the most crushing proof of her misdoing.

In the case of Don Pedro, we find a comparable bent for factitious compliment. He completes his greeting of Hero by advising her, "Be happy, lady, for you are like an honorable father" (I.i.99), where the conclusion, though as amiable as one could wish, does not follow very cogently from the premise. There is a connection, it would seem, between the easy reaching out for courtly phrases of none too exact an application, and the easy crediting of slanders and false seemings. In both cases we find a rather complacent tendency to rest in mere words, a failure to join the word firmly enough with its object, its circumstance, its human referent.

Don Pedro and Leonato are both given to manufacturing complimental phrases, but by far the most unregenerate euphuist in the play is Don John the bastard brother. His opening speeches weave a dense network of symmetrical schemes, a kind of cat's cradle of language from within which he glares out at the world. In answer to Conrade's counsel of patience he replies,

> I wonder that thou (being, as thou say'st thou art, born under Saturn) goest about to apply a moral medicine to a mortifying mischief. I cannot hide what I am: I must be sad when I have cause, and smile at no man's jests; eat when I have stomach, and wait for no man's leisure; sleep when I am drowsy, and tend on no man's business; laugh when I am merry, and claw no man in his humor. (I.iii.9-16)

In this formidably exact and relentless sequence, only the parenthetical remark at the beginning budges from strict symmetry: each of the four alleged signs of the speaker's candor observes identical form, and the initial challenge reinforces its symmetry with a bludgeoning alliteration—"being born," "moral medicine," "mortifying mischief." The scene continues in similar vein, climaxing with the decision to set snares for Claudio: "If I can cross him any way, I bless myself every way" (59-60), which, like much in this brief interchange, is almost actinomorphic in its symmetry. There seems little doubt that the rigid, bristling symmetries are meant to convey something of the speaker's rigid, bristling temperament. He sees the world in sharp and irreconcilable contraries—blacks and whites, loves and hates,

friends and enemies. It is a world without shadows, half-lights, or gradations of any kind.

One way to think of the action is to see it as a process in which Don John momentarily imposes his own harsh and negative view of life on Claudio, Don Pedro, and Leonato. Each of the three victims is predisposed to catch the infection. Don Pedro and Leonato perceive the world through a haze of sentimentalizing rhetoric, less as it is than as they wish it were, or think it should be, or as others have taught them it is. Claudio is not so much the perpetrator of linguistic affectation as he is the rhetorical innocent, who cannot yet distinguish authentic from inauthentic utterance, Don Pedro's loyal promises from Don John's rancorous slanders, or Hero's pleadings from her accuser's lies. All three—Leonato, Claudio, and Don Pedro—share a tendency to adopt the role of interlocutor in ensemble situations. In the scenes of masculine teasing among the young men, Claudio and Don Pedro consciously make themselves into Benedick's stooges. They launch a rhetorical sequence counting on him to complete it; they turn themselves into accompanying instruments to his solo performances. Thus when Claudio, with suspicious suspiciousness, accuses Don Pedro of praising Hero merely "to fetch [him] in," Don Pedro protests:

> DON PEDRO. By my troth, I speak my thought.
> CLAUDIO. And, in faith, my lord, I spoke mine.
> BENEDICK. And, by my two faiths and troths, my lord, I spoke mine. (I.i.199-202)

The first two speeches serve chiefly to provide a scaffolding for the third; they initiate a pattern which Benedick proceeds to complete with the greater length and emphasis of his own speech. What follows is even purer ensemble playing, in which the individual voices nearly lose their distinguishable identities.

> CLAUDIO. That I love her, I feel.
> DON PEDRO. That she is worthy, I know.
> BENEDICK. That I neither feel how she should be loved, nor know how she should be worthy, is the opinion that fire cannot melt out of me. I will die in it at the stake.
> (I.i.203-207)

Here the first two utterances, of Claudio and Don Pedro, can scarcely claim any independent existence at all; they are simply building blocks on which Benedick can erect his little tower of wit. They are strictly preparatory, and it is hard to imagine them spoken any other way. If the dialogue were to break off after Don Pedro's contribution, we would be left dangling in mid-air, frustrated by the refusal of the passage to reach its expected goal. What we have in fact is a suspension distributed among three speakers, in which the subordinate units, although grammatically complete, and themselves consisting of small resolved suspensions, remain rhetorically open until Benedick comes to secure and fasten them. The last link in this chain

of sequences allows slightly more independence to the subsidiary voices, but by this time they have been firmly established *as* subsidiary. We hear them as needing to be completed, and Shakespeare takes pains not to disappoint us.

> DON PEDRO. Thou wast ever an obstinate heretic in the despite of beauty.
> CLAUDIO. And never could maintain his part but in the force of his will.
> BENEDICK. That a woman conceived me, I thank her; that she brought me up, I likewise give her most humble thanks; but that I will have a rechate winded in my forehead, or hang my bugle in an invisible baldrick, all women shall pardon me. Because I will not do them the wrong to mistrust any, I will do myself the right to trust none; and the fine is (for the which I may go the finer), I will live a bachelor. (I.i.212-219)

We may notice that not only does Benedick conclude the sequence with the fullest climax so far, but that the whole sequence forms a climax to a chain of sequences, with which the players take fresh breath before proceeding to the next round. Don Pedro and Claudio, clearly, are both inveterate straight men, and this habit serves them badly when matters of moment are at stake; it makes them terribly vulnerable to Don John's sophistries. It is appalling to hear, as he spins his incantations, how quickly he hypnotizes them into becoming *his* subordinate voices.

> DON JOHN. If you dare not trust that you see, confess not that you know. If you will follow me, I will show you enough; and when you have seen more and heard more, proceed accordingly.
> CLAUDIO. If I see anything to-night why I should not wed her to-morrow, in the congregation where I should wed there will I shame her.
> DON PEDRO. And, as I wooed for thee to obtain her, I will join with thee to disgrace her. (III.ii.104-112)

The identity between the verbal manner and the sinister intention is close. As this interchange makes evident, long before Claudio and Don Pedro have "seen" anything at all, they have had their sight poisoned by Don John's allegations. His threatening but vague advice to "proceed accordingly" they instantly translate, with an alacrity he could hardly improve on, into a vindictive fantasy of "undoing," in which the fancied and as yet hypothetical insult is to be avenged by an answering and symmetrical injury.[4] The scene closes as the three merge their separate identities into one, chorally intoning their participation in a baleful and mysterious rite.

> DON PEDRO. O day untowardly turned!
> CLAUDIO. O mischief strangely thwarting!
> DON JOHN. O plague right well prevented!
> So will you say when you have seen the sequel. (116-119)

Doubtless what we catch in Claudio's denunciations in the church scene are echoes, or vestiges, of this same hypnosis, even after the dialogue has shifted into verse: "But fare thee well, most foul, most fair! Farewell, / Thou pure impiety and impious purity!"[5]

Beatrice and Benedick too are given to syntactic symmetry, but they practice it with a playfulness that allows it to develop freely as an instrument of criticism and wit—without the spiky rigidity of Don John or the complacent echoing to and fro of Leonato, Claudio, and Don Pedro. The occasional moment of stiffness we can put down to an initial defensiveness, a refusal to grant full freedom to their own feelings. Generally, in this play, excessive patterning seems to be a symptom of repression. We might compare Brutus's funeral oration for Caesar in Act III of *Julius Caesar,* which, in its severe schematism, suggests its speaker's remoteness from reality, his cramping of his experience into geometrical abstractions, and observe how Antony's speech, by contrast, follows no predetermined syntactic direction, and spills over at every point with intimate particularities. It is possible for Beatrice, retorting to Benedick's gibes, to say "I had rather hear my dog bark at a crow than a man swear he loves me," or, "A bird of my tongue is better than a beast of yours," but these stiff antitheses occur during the scene of preliminary skirmishing, and are quickly transcended. More typical would be Benedick's mocking answer to Claudio when solicited for his opinion of Hero.

> Why, i' faith, methinks she's too low for a high praise, too brown for a fair praise, and too little for a great praise. Only this commendation I can afford her, that were she other than she is, she were unhandsome, and being no other but as she is, I do not like her. (I.i.152-156)

This is symmetrical and mannered with a purpose: it maintains Benedick's pose as the resident misogynist. It is deliberate play-acting, in which the effect is meant to be theatrical, as Claudio very well understands when he replies, "Thou thinkest I am in sport." Even more shamelessly theatrical is Benedick's onslaught on matrimony already quoted.

> That a woman conceived me, I thank her; that she brought me up, I likewise give her most humble thanks; but that I will have a rechate winded in my forehead, or hang my bugle in an invisible baldrick, all women shall pardon me. Because I will not do them the wrong to mistrust any, I will do myself the right to trust none; and the fine is (for the which I may go the finer), I will live a bachelor. (I.i.214-219)

Benedick here picks up the suspended "that" clause, already used three times by himself and his companions, and makes it the basis of a new sequence, compelling the suspense and attention of his hearers as the clauses mount in length, weight, and portentousness. The sequence comes to a bathetic climax with the rechate and the hanging of the bugle, symbols of subservience and uxoriousness, and is then capped by the symmetry of "Because I will not do them the wrong to mistrust any, I will do myself the right to mistrust none"—a beautiful specimen of pseudologic, in which the syntactic parallel insinuates the presence of a logical parallel that is completely denied by the terms themselves. One drawback, obviously, of exact symmetry is that it invites false reasoning, by disguising it and enabling it

to pass for real thinking, where a more "natural" syntax would force it to show itself in its true colors. The false reasoning reaches a conclusion with the quibbling over "fine" and "finer," in which the quasi-logical expression "fine" once more falsely implies the presence of syllogistic activity.

Similarly playful is Beatrice's refusal to entertain the prospect of a husband, with or without beard:

> He that hath a beard is more than a youth, and he that hath no beard is less than a man; and he that is more than a youth is not for me; and he that is less than a man, I am not for him. Therefore I will even take sixpence in earnest of the berrord and lead his apes into hell. (II.i.31-35)

This is more open in its jocularity than Benedick's speech; it makes less effort to conceal its own workings, maliciously advancing illogical premises in order to arrive at perverse and implausible conclusions. The rhythm of Beatrice's speech, moreover, its pronounced anapestic lilt, contributes to the effect of gracious fooling, and confirms the sportive implications of the mock logic: "hé / that is móre / than a yóuth / is nót / for mé; / and hé / that is léss / than a mán, / I am nót / for hím."

But characteristic, also, of both speakers would be moments in which the symmetry is only approximate and rough, rather than fussily exact, as in Beatrice's advice to Hero:

> For, hear me, Hero: wooing, wedding, and repenting is as a Scotch jig, a measure, and a cinque-pace: the first suit is hot and hasty like a Scotch jig (and full as fantastical); the wedding, mannerly modest, as a measure, full of state and ancientry; and then comes Repentance and with his bad legs falls into the cinque-pace faster and faster, till he sink into his grave. (II.i.63-69)

The expectedly stiff design is actually worked out with great freedom. No element in the pattern is allowed to harden into predictability. Beatrice not only does not insist on perfect correspondence between parallel details in successive members, she carefully avoids it. Even the introductory formulae are subject to variation. From "the first suit," we might reasonably expect a numbered series to follows: "the second," "the third," etc. Instead, the second item is introduced by name: "the wedding." From this we might, in turn, expect a parallel, "repenting," in the final member of the series, instead of which a creaky gaffer named Repentance, an intruder from the morality drama, comes lurching in on ailing legs and does a *danse macabre.* Beatrice, we notice, objectifies her fears more successfully than Benedick. Instead of pointing relentlessly to herself, as Benedick does, she simply conjures up a comic vignette that grotesquely exposes the pitfalls of matrimony. Her maiden pride, it would seem, falls less patly into posing than Benedick's show-off misogyny; there is less assumption in it of total knowingness and total control. But both of them, even in their defensive jousting in the opening scene, spar with language with a witty composure quite foreign to their associates. They fall neither into prefabricated strips of

compliment nor into Don John's compulsive concern for balance in clause, phrase, and word.

More striking still is the greater freedom they achieve when they break out of their self-protective word spinning, when they allow the dikes they have built against each other to crumble. If we look at Benedick's soliloquies just before and just after his gulling at the hands of Don Pedro and company, we find the first to be egregious in its rhetorical volubility, swarming with self-satisfied niceties of phrase:

> I have known when he would have walked ten mile afoot to see a good armor; and now will he lie ten nights awake carving the fashion of a new doublet. He was wont to speak plain and to the purpose, like an honest man and a soldier; and now is he turned orthography. . . . May I be so converted and see with these eyes? I cannot tell: I think not. . . . One woman is fair, yet I am well; another is wise, yet I am well; another virtuous, yet I am well; but till all graces be in one woman, one woman shall not come in my grace. (II.iii.14-27)

And so forth—endlessly loquacious as well as endlessly charming in its self-deceiving sophistry, and deliberately exaggerated for the sake of the peripety to follow. The hoax concluded, a chastened Benedick creeps forth from hiding, and a sobered Benedick speaks plain and to the purpose for perhaps the first time:

> This can be no trick. The conference was sadly borne; they have the truth of this from Hero; they seem to pity the lady. It seems her affections have their full bent. Love me? Why, it must be requited. I hear how I am censured. They say I will bear myself proudly if I perceive the love come from her. They say too that she will rather die than give any sign of affection. I did never think to marry. I must not seem proud. (II.iii.202-209)

And so forth once more, gradually working back up from simple statements, unadorned by witty figuration, into something like the old effusiveness. For half a moment, at least, in the shock of what he has heard, nearly all self-regarding performance, all self-preening rhetoric evaporate, leaving declarations naked as truth's simplicity.[6] The collapse of Benedick's stylistic cunning serves as the outward sign of an enlarged conscience and a diminished ego, a newly tentative attitude toward his own relations with the rest of the world.

A kindred effect occurs in the aftermath of the church scene, when Beatrice and Benedick, thinking as much of Hero for the moment as of themselves, absentmindedly, as it were, confess their love to each other. The verbal fencing on this occasion, which culminates in Benedick's pledge to challenge his friend, has the same sobering effect on him as the hoax in the garden.

> Enough, I am engaged. I will challenge him. I will kiss your hand, and so I leave you. By this hand, Claudio shall render me a dear account. As you hear of me, so think of me. Go comfort your cousin. I must say she is dead—and so farewell. (IV.i.325-329)

Again the movement is notably terse, bare of syntactic or metaphoric bedizenment. The one approach to symmetry ("As you hear of me, so think of

me") is laconic, bare of wit, designed not to show the speaker's oratorical mastery but rather the intensity of his commitment. As before, the forcible refocusing of his gaze onto someone other than himself—in the present case Hero as well as Beatrice—helps break down the ornamental shell in which his ego was wont to disport itself. Much the same may be said for his challenge to Claudio and his farewell to Don Pedro a moment later.

> Fare you well, boy; you know my mind. I will leave you now to your gossip-like humor. You break jests as braggards do their blades, which God be thanked hurt not. My lord, for your many courtesies I thank you. I must discontinue your company. Your brother the bastard is fled from Messina. You have among you killed a sweet and innocent lady. (V.i.178-184)

Once more the members are short, heavily punctuated with disapproving silences. Anger clogs the tongue. Don Pedro's surprised comment to Claudio is very much to the point: "What a pretty thing man is when he goes in his doublet and hose and leaves off his wit."

Since these lines have been much tortured in paraphrase by editors and commentators,[7] perhaps a further reading may be ventured: "What a foolish creature a man is when he restricts himself to the bare essentials of speech, and abandons all brilliance and sociability." "Goes in his doublet and hose" we may take to mean, roughly, "neither wholly naked nor fully arrayed"—decently protected against the elements, but not fashionably attired.[8] Where Benedick was wont to strut in linguistic finery, in the stylistic equivalent of feathered hat and ruffled boot and embroidered cloak, he now has stripped himself to the counterpart of doublet and hose, to fighting terms such as convey sober meanings and merely cover his nakedness. Total nakedness would be total inarticulateness, or silence, from which we may infer that expressiveness of language is as proper to a man as elegance of dress—that fashion, indeed, is as much a promoter of community as it is a deformed thief. Don Pedro's image permits us to look forward peacefully, even complacently, to Benedick's return to his earlier manner. The fanciful style need not, because it is decorative and high-spirited, be construed as insincere or inauthentic. It may equally well be viewed as the companionable style, appropriate to merry living and good fellowship, suited to all the characters in the play except the venomous Don John, whose euphuisms erect a prison wall behind which he barricades himself against the world.

What happens to Benedick happens less spectacularly to Beatrice. Under the pressure of strong feeling she too, for a moment, abandons her verbal arabesques, and goes in the feminine equivalent of doublet and hose, civilly suited but without glitter or glamor. The fulcral point is the same conversation with Benedick in the church in which they make their mutual avowal.

> BENEDICK. I do love nothing in the world so well as you. Is not that strange?
>
> BEATRICE. As strange as the thing I know not. It were possible for me to say I loved nothing in the world so well as you. But believe me not; and yet I lie not. I confess nothing, nor I deny nothing. I am sorry for my cousin. (IV.i.266-269)

As with Benedick in the same moment, effusiveness contracts into curtness; the few symmetrical phrases that remain ("believe me not, and yet I lie not") have nothing expansive or exuberant about them. Beatrice, however, knows her own mind better than Benedick, and it is a less self-absorbed mind. It leaves her able to maintain a fairly high density of verbal artifice to speak her feelings. As she reassembles her shattered thoughts, she resumes her rhetorical figurations, rising toward an impassioned climax which, with most oratorical cunning, she breaks off near its height in order to convey her inability to express her indignation adequately—thereby contriving to express it very adequately indeed.

> BENEDICK. Is Claudio thine enemy?
> BEATRICE. Is 'a not approved in the height a villain, that hath slandered, scorned, dishonored my kinswoman? O that I were a man! What? bear her in hand until they come to take hands, and then with public accusation, uncovered slander, unmitigated rancor—O God, that I were a man! I would eat his heart in the market place. (IV.i.297-302)

In search of a structure that will embody her feelings properly, Beatrice adopts a climactic triad of verbs—slandered, scorned, dishonored—and then, after an anguished, "witty" equivocation on "hand," a second and more emphatic triad of noun phrases, "public accusation, uncovered slander, unmitigated rancor." But the increasingly heavy adjectives, ending with the ponderously polysyllabic "unmitigated," somehow fail to climax fully. The irresistible motion falters, threatens to disintegrate, and Beatrice, to salvage what is left of it, instead of concluding her pattern with a triumphant resolution of the syntax, breaks off with an exclamation in the manner of Cicero. Instead of trying to complete her damning characterization of Claudio's betrayal, she shifts to an excited fantasy of what she would like to do to Claudio to avenge his cruelty, a fantasy involving, in fact, doing literally to Claudio what he has just done figuratively to Hero. Her vehemence floods over unchecked into the speech that follows.

> Princes and Counties! Surely a princely testimony, a goodly count, Count Comfect! a sweet gallant surely! O that I were a man for his sake! or that I had any friend were a man for my sake! But manhood is melted into curtsies, valor into compliment, and men are only turned into tongue, and trim ones too. He is now as valiant as Hercules that only tells a lie, and swears it. I cannot be a man with wishing; therefore I will die a woman with grieving. (IV.i.310-318)

Here the anger erupts in a burst of scornful word-play, in which the more biting the accusations, the more insultingly exact become the symmetries, and the more insistent the quibbling on loaded words like "Count" and "Prince." But the fury against Claudio, however negative in itself, rests on a positive, unselfish affection for Hero. Beatrice brings the figures into play not, this time, to defend her own pride, or make light of the idol matrimony, but to register her frustration at a real grievance which on her own she is powerless to redress. In so doing she confers a positive value on the wit that

Benedick has retreated from, using it not for exhibitionism but for loyalty, not for swashbuckling but to express the anger that a man can express, if he chooses, with his sword.

Together with Don Pedro's trope of the doublet and hose, then, Beatrice's anger helps rehabilitate verbal wit from the discredit into which the other characters have cast it. She shows it capable not merely of disguising feeling and evading it, but also of expressing it, and not merely negative feeling, like Don John's spite, but the positive affections as well. The finale, in consequence, need not leave any of the characters stripped to their doublet and hose; in the play's terms this would not be a desirable, let alone an ideal condition. It can restore them instead to the full wear of their festive garments, only with a new freedom. The figures re-emerge, but they no longer exert their old coercive pressure. Benedick's query, for example, "And I pray you now tell me, for which of my bad parts didst thou first fall in love with me?" provokes a witty retort from Beatrice and a repetition of the same query (with minor variations) addressed to him. But the repetition, "For which of my good parts did you first suffer love for me?" produces no clever riposte from Benedick to match Beatrice's sally. He does not even trouble to answer the question, but allows himself to be struck by a difference in wording: "Suffer love!—a good epithet. I do suffer love indeed, for I love thee against my will" (V.ii.59-68). It is true that the breaking of the pattern here springs from egoism—it enables Benedick to force the conversation back to himself, just when it was threatening to be deflected onto Beatrice. At the same time the cool sabotage of a pattern he himself has initiated suggests freedom, a lessened dependence on syntactic strictness, a more fluid give-and-take with his environment.

The path, then, which has led momentarily away from the patterning, away from the gorgeous cloak and the fashionable appurtenances, now leads back to them, but they now are worn more casually. The bewildered Benedick of the hoaxing scene, the grim Benedick of the challenge scene, have been changed back once more into the boon companion of the opening scenes, but with fewer defenses. The mock logic returns, but this time it mocks itself. The patterns have been broken down in crisis, their shortcomings exposed, and then reassembled to serve as emblems and ornaments of sociable man in society.

NOTES

1. III.iii.121-128. Shakespearean citations will be to *The Complete Pelican Shakespeare*, ed. Alfred Harbage (Baltimore, 1969). *Much Ado About Nothing*, ed. Josephine Waters Bennett, pp. 272-304.

2. Two excellent essays have made some suggestive comments on the prose style of this play: Charles A. Owen, Jr., "Comic Awareness, Style, and Dramatic Technique in *Much Ado About Nothing*," *Boston University Studies in English*, 5 (1961), 193-207; and William G. McCollom,

"The Role of Wit in *Much Ado About Nothing*," *SQ*, **19** (1968), 165-174. Adam Pasicki, "Some Rhetorical Figures in 'Much Ado About Nothing,'" *Kwartalnik Neofilologiczny*, **15** (2/1968), 147-154, discusses the use of two specific devices, anaphora and antimetabole, in the play.

3. See J. A. Barish, "Continuities and Discontinuities in Shakespearian Prose," in Clifford Leech, ed., *Shakespeare 1971* (Toronto, 1973), pp. 68-69.

4. On "undoing," with its implications of symmetry, as a cardinal feature of revenge in the psychic life and in revenge drama, see David Willbern, "The Elizabethan Revenge Play: A Psychoanalytic Inquiry" (unpublished dissertation, University of California, Berkeley, 1973).

5. See McCollom, "The Role of Wit," p. 167: "If the dialogue [i.e., in the church scene] is recognized as a distortion of wit, the scene becomes a grim sequel to the opening scenes and not an absolute break with them." McCollom also notes that Claudio "tends to repeat in somewhat different words the jests of the Prince," and that "This echolalia illustrates the lack of independence which will cause him to swallow the slander of Don John and mirror the response made by the Prince" (p. 168). Yes, but the Prince himself suffers from "echolalia" and "lack of independence." When he takes the lead, it is usually in a subordinate sense, as in the final words of the present scene, and he does not always take the lead: he mirrors Claudio's threats of vengeance, and matches him in flipness in the quarrel with the two old men (V.i) and the confrontation with Benedick that follows.

6. See Owen, "Comic Awareness," p. 198: "when he [Benedick] speaks again, the pattern of his utterance, as of his world, has been broken. The pieces lie as disconnected fragments of direct experience." "Love," says Owen, again (p. 206), "has released him from the tyranny of elaborate syntax." See also Brian Vickers, *The Artistry of Shakespeare's Prose* (London, 1968), p. 184.

7. See, e.g., H. H. Furness, ed., *A New Variorum Edition of Shakespeare's Much Adoe About Nothing* (Philadelphia, 1899), p. 257; and J. Dover Wilson, ed., *Much Ado About Nothing* (Cambridge, 1962; first ed., 1923), p. 147.

8. See *The Merry Wives of Windsor*, III.i.46, where it also means, as no doubt in the present case, "dressed for a duel."